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← Experimental Video

← The artworld and the development of the field

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← This is a preliminary survey of the experimental video artworld which stresses its historical development.

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← What is experimental, avant garde?

! One strong line of relationship is with the world of experimental film, which has a longer history but many of the same characteristics.

- However there is a long standing difference, even antagonism in many cases between the Two areas.
- For summary, see CK in JC online

! Some differences in terms

- Avant garde

- Often meant to refer to a specific art movement of the early 20C, peaking in the 1920s and seen as over, expended (Peter Burger)
- But also a polemical position, art which is in advance of the mainstream or conventionally accepted
- (for me) a useful term that indicates a relation to the larger artworld

- Experimental--implies something new, something different, something tentative

- Actual source, Zola (experimental novel, experimental theatre)
- And is thus often rejected as a term by makers who claim they are not being "experimental or tentative"
- But useful for implication that it is open ended, willing to change, etc.

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← The actual start of video, television

! New industrial technology (late 20s, early 30s)

- ! Not really developed into a broadcast medium until post war USA, c. 1947
 - Since the field was unformed, there is a lot of "primitive" work, and the conventions or expectations are not yet in place.
 - There is a lot of room for innovation, unexpected things, idiosyncratic forms
 - Even within commercial parameters, innovation and experimentation
 - Most famously, Ernie Kovacs
 - But also Soupy Sales, many others.
 - Some of this is underrecognized today, but many forms were taken over from existing broadcast radio--early TV was in many ways illustrated radio
 - It often remains dominated by the soundtrack
 - This is in distinct contrast to film, which not only historically but often aesthetically, develops as a visual form with sound added as a creative element only later.
- ! So, one line of development is in terms of outliers in the history of television, but also in various independent and renegade forms and institutions.
- ! Understand as well, that television newsgathering technology was solidly film based until the late 1970s. This created a huge infrastructure for 16mm film which made it especially viable as a technology for artists working on low(er) budgets. That began to change in the later 70s with the Silver Crisis (get details) and the concomitant change to "portable" broadcast-quality video technology.
 - However there was some entry for noncommercial, "amateur" television production due to municipal contractual arrangements, especially as developed in cable contracts

- There was a political struggle in many of the later communities (esp. large cities such as Chicago) to get cable during the 80s in which local activists managed to get public access channels, some commitments to training, some subsidy, etc. This created an alternative space (and look) for SOME parts of the spectrum.
- ! Another line of development comes in terms of the PoRTAPAK and independent video production.
 - This was regarded as “not broadcast quality” by broadcast television engineers/gatekeepers
 - But that rejection was also an inspiration
 - Created a community of people working outside of the existing dominant video (TV) system who by and large had no aspiration to enter the dominant arena
 - Using the same simple technology, these people were (not exclusively)
 - Members of the emerging bohemian artworld of the time, young artists, etc. who could not really afford to work in film (or at least on a regular basis) e.g., Fluxus, Nam June Paik
 - Established artists, even younger ones, who had developed in an existing field and who found video a useful way of documenting their performances, or of pushing the boundaries of their existing form through technology
 - ! Especially performance artists
 - Linda Montano (stage performance)
 - Laurie Anderson (music)
 - Others in performance, standup comedy, dance, etc.
 - ! Activists, who had something to document, say, explain, and who saw video as a way of broadly disseminating their concerns
 - Anti-Vietnam war
 - General counter culture rebellion
 - Student movement

- Feminist movement
- Gay movement,
- Special cases***:
 - Civil rights movement evolving into Black Power movement
 - Latino movement (esp. Chicano)
 - Asian American
 - Native American
 - ***in many cases, the most experienced media producers in these areas had traditional skills and (some) access, esp. to film and broadcast television and younger people had (some) access to more traditional training.
- The fullest flowering of the activist trend was in terms of AIDS activism in the 1980s and early 90s. (Boyle; Gomez)
- While predominantly oriented to documentary forms, these trends also developed along the lines of the video essay, the personal/diary/autobiographical form, etc.

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